

How to
Process
Better
B&W
Images



Processing Introduction

This Digital Booklet is intended to take the mystery away from processing monochrome images. It covers:

- 1. People**
- 2. Merged Panoramas**
- 3. Composites**
- 4. Abstract Macro Stacking**

I hope you find this 'How-To' booklet useful and all feedback to improve it is welcome.

People Images: LR, DXO and PS

I have chosen 6 case studies here to illustrate different applications, subjects and stories:

Case 1 – Environmental Portrait.

Case 2 – Disaster Recovery.

Case 3 – Family Candid.

Case 4 – Town People.

Case 5 – Event People.

Case 6 – Satire.

Processing Case Study 1

Environmental Portrait

Meet Joe the Ship Builder. The light was harsh making facial detail difficult. The case tackles selecting the right subject image then how to quiet down the bright backdrop and restore Joe as the primary focus. A 30 min conversation gave a rich choice of images to select from.

Step 1 – Selection



Joe seated:
Interesting hand gesture.
Lower energy.
Eyes not quite to camera.
Good boat context on left



Joe staggering:
Interesting posture makes you wonder what is happening to Joe.
Not much of face is visible.
Good boat context but partly obscured



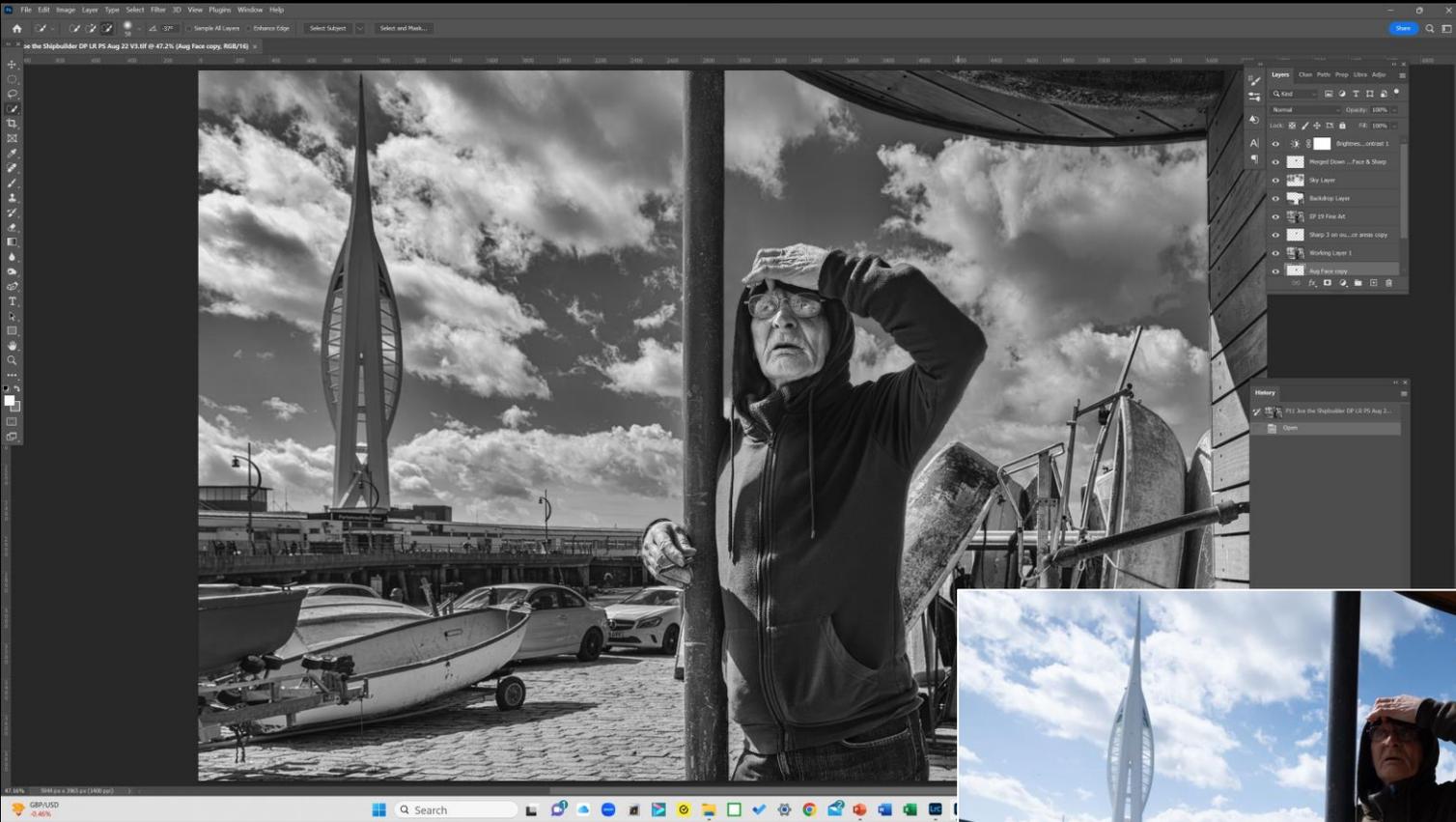
Joe telling his life story
More reflective posture.
New location detail from tower.
Facial detail challenging to recover in shadows
Vertical pole down the middle gives a juxtaposition between Joe's world and city

Step 2 – Lightroom & DXO Basics



1. Minor cropping left and bottom
2. Levelled Horizontals and Verticals (but creating empty area top right edge)
3. Reduced Highlights but increased Shadow to restore facial details
4. Used DXO to improve grain and sharpness
5. Increased orange for Faces; decreased blue for sky detail

Step 3 – Photoshop Light Adjustments



Final



RAW

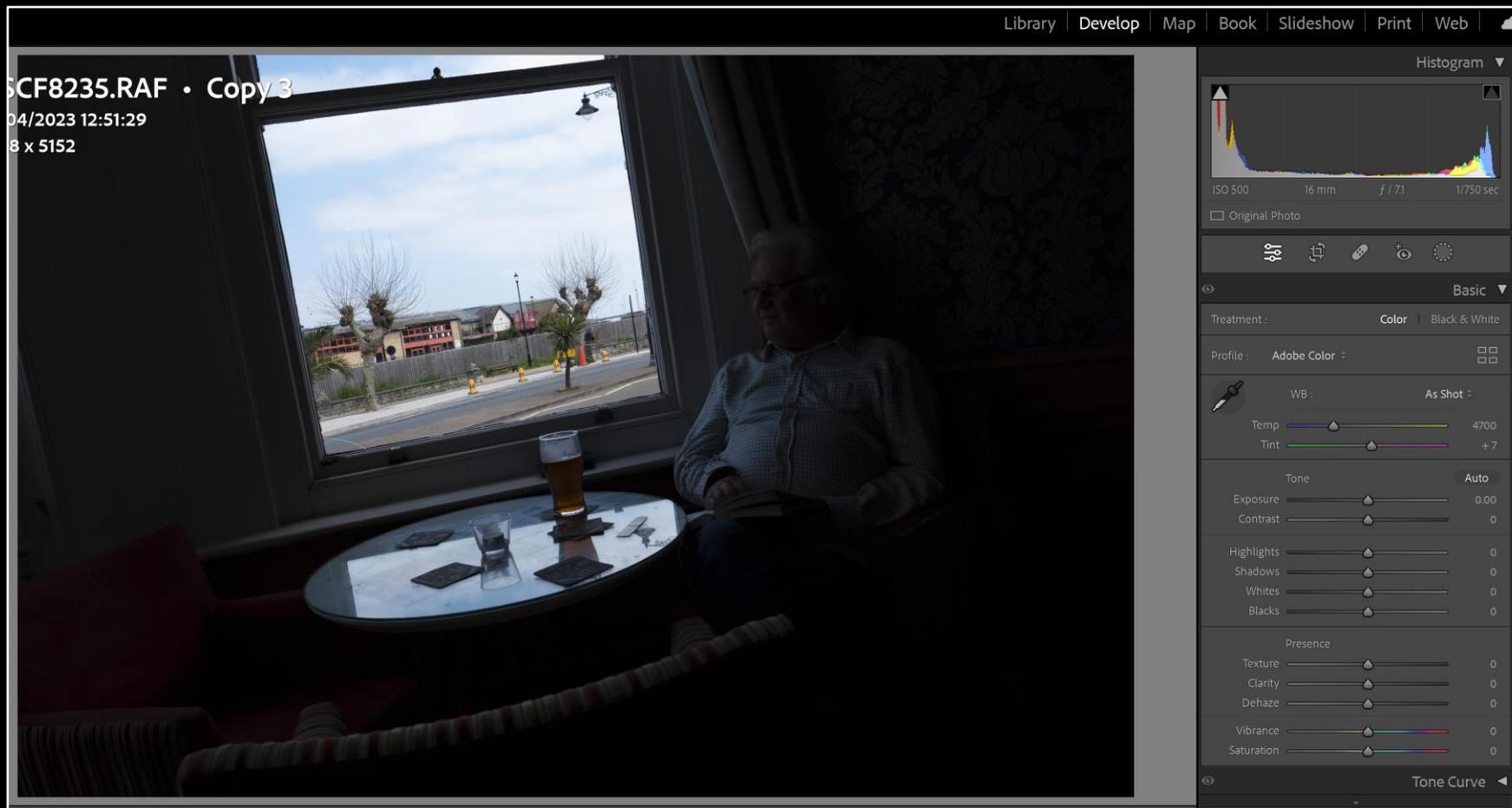
1. Cloned in top of shelter top right
2. More Midtone on face
3. More Highlights and Shadow on eyes
4. Reduced Sky Brightness by 1 stop
5. Increased jumper Shadow bright
6. Sharpened face
7. Cloned out fine halo around body and pole

Processing Case Study 2

Disaster Recovery

I hope this processing case gives everyone hope. The shot was taken on automatic; the light and focus was set by the window not the subject. The grain is consequently strong. The view is poor. The case shows how a reasonable image can still be delivered from initial processing to final print.

Step 1 - RAW



1. Camera was set to Aperture Priority, Manual Focus at 2.5m, but.....
2. Sensor exposed for window not the room
3. Subject is lost
4. Horizon is not level
5. Indifferent view
6. Histogram is polarised between blacks and whites

Step 2 - Start rescue in Lightroom

Library | Develop | Map | Book | Slideshow | Print | Web

DSCF8235.RAF • Copy 1

19/04/2023 12:51:29

7116 x 3971



Histogram

Profile: Adobe Monochrome

WB: As Shot

Temp: 4700

Tint: +7

Tone: Auto

Exposure: +1.45

Contrast: 0

Highlights: -84

Shadows: +86

Whites: -8

Blacks: 0

Presence

Texture: 0

Clarity: +28

Dehaze: +9

Vibrance: 0

Saturation: 0

Tone Curve

B & W

Black & White Mix

Red: 0

Orange: +57

Yellow: 0

Green: 0

Aqua: 0

Blue: -40

Purple: 0

Magenta: 0

1. Used own B&W Preset for People
2. Increased Exposure by 1.5 to view room
3. Corrected alignment
4. Cropped to reduce window dominance
5. Pushed up Shadows to see man
6. Reduced Highlights
7. Increased Orange for face detail
8. Reduced Blue for Sky drama
9. Sharpened slightly

Step 3 - DXO PureRAW2 for quality



1. Used PureRAW2 as Lightroom Plug-in to reduce Grain and help Sharpness
2. Takes 30 seconds to process – superior to new LR DeNoise
3. Produces a DNG File to continue to refine in LR
4. Export finale file as TIFF to Photoshop

Step 4 - Photoshop final adjustments



1. Copied Window to new layer and darkened
2. Cloned detail into bottom left corner
3. Spot Removal and minor detail removal
4. Increased Midtones on face and shirt
5. Darkened Midtones /Shadows in all 4 corners to increase man as focal point
6. Darkened top of sky
7. Darkened Beer
8. Reduce Highlights on left of face

Step 5 – Alternative view for fun



Final



Leave you with the choice as to whether this is a good or a bad thing to do!

1. Found an image taken nearby 30 mins before
2. Cloned into Window Layer
3. Blended edge to match
4. Further reduced Brightness



RAW

Step 6 – Print from Lightroom

The screenshot shows the Adobe Lightroom Print module interface. The main window displays a black and white photograph of an elderly woman sitting by a window. A dialog box titled "SC-P600 Series(Network) Properties" is open, showing settings for the printer. The dialog includes sections for Media Settings (Epson Premium Luster, Advanced B&W Photo, Max Quality, Neutral mode), Paper Settings (Front - Fine Art, A4 210 x 297 mm), and Ink Levels. The print job settings panel on the right shows "Print Resolution" set to 1440 ppi, "Print Sharpening" set to High, and "Print Adjustment" with Brightness at +12 and Contrast at +10. The printer's name "Epson SureColor P600" is visible at the top of the right panel.



1. Used Advanced B&W Photo settings
2. Used Printer Profile for PJ FBP300 paper
3. Always need to make adjustments to Bright & Contrast
4. Takes me 3-4 Prints to get a good final

Processing Case Study 3

Family Candid

These 'contre jour' images are interesting as they show fleeting moments the eye can miss. Selection, cropping and restoring facial detail were key to processing the selected image.

Step 1 - Selection



The Buggie:

Dynamic image.

Not telling us much about the
People or the town



The Family:

The white and posture of the child
catches the eye.

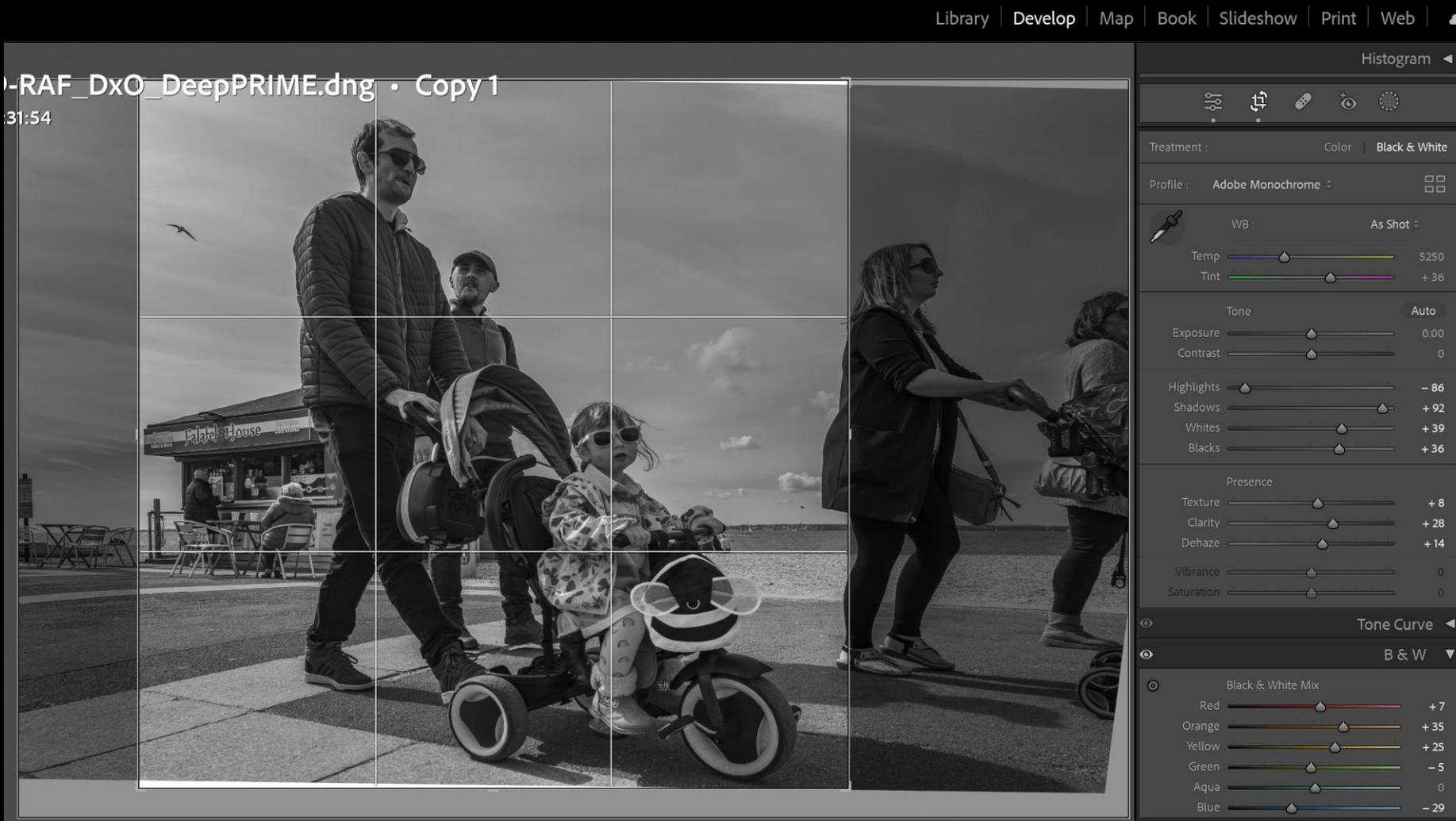
We are too late to catch the face.
Not much new story telling from
parents



The Girl:

Attention grabbing girl on cycle
looking straight to camera.
Interest in the adult conversation
ignoring child.
Awful backlighting and mothers
walking out of frame

Step 2 – Lightroom & DXO Basics



1. Cropped women from left to bring focus to child and men
2. Reduced Highlights but increased Shadow to restore facial details
3. Used DXO to improve grain and sharpness
4. Increased Orange for Faces; yellow for pavement; decreased blue for sky detail
5. Levelled Horizontals and Verticals

Step 3 – Photoshop Light Adjustments



Final



1. Cloned out rest of Woman on right
2. More Midtone on all faces
3. Reduced Sky
Brightness by 1 stop
4. Increased men's clothing Shadow
5. Sharpened faces
6. Increased girl's Mid & Highs to make her the focal point
7. Cloned out white lines around men following Sharpening

Processing Case Study 4

Town People

These two women were outside a Bingo Hall. The selected image was missing some of the hall detail and required a little cloning in of the hall frontage to tell the story.

Step 1 - Selection

My Engagement Intro:

“What time is the Bingo Hall opening?.....I am doing a doing a photo project to see how people are coping with rising prices”



Ambiguity:

Narrative content is low.
In fact they were pointing at drips



Humour:

Strong engagement but no eye contact.
They were laughing at their Bingo Hall manager



Anger:

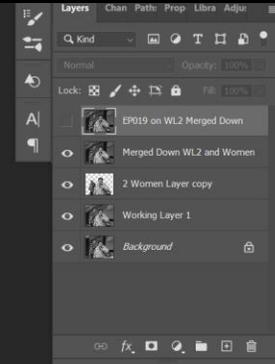
A shocking image of apparent anger.
They were telling me about making their budgets stretch.
But no clear context of location

Step 2 – Lightroom & DXO Basics



1. Levelled Horizontals and Verticals
2. Cropped 10-20% from each side
3. Reduced Highlights on Faces and white coat
4. Sharpened to 21pt
5. Used DXO to improve Grain and sharpness
6. Increased Orange for Faces

Step 3 – Strengthening Backdrop story right in PS



After



1. Cloned in alternative more complete 'Play Slot' signage from same shoot to give clear message on Austerity
2. Moved black door edge away from main woman's head
3. Cloned out blank BRHC corner using Warp

Step 4 – Final light adjustments in PS



Final



RAW

1. Used EfexPro Fine Art 019 Plug-in to boost Midtones and Contrast
2. Darkened Backdrop slightly and brightened Women to make them the focal point
3. Cloned out white lines of Women against Backdrop
4. Brightened Woman's eyes and teeth to make anger clearer

Processing Case Study 5

Event People

This horse Owner had just won a major race and I wanted to tell his story with the media scrum around him. The image selection and cropping were key to simplifying the final image. Permission from the venue allowed me to take the images.

Step 1 - Selection



Media Scrum 1:
Owner's face clear.
All Media clear and in shot

Owner & Interviewer:
Better shot of Owner & Interviewer.
Crowd most visible.
Lost sight of media.
No horse

Media Scrum 2:
As for 'Media Scrum 1'.
Winning horse visible.
'1' Place sign is not obscured.
Owner clearly loving his 'moment'.

...telling the strongest story

Step 2 – Lightroom Basics



- Cropped off bottom 25% (no photographic value) to achieve a 2:1 Aspect Ratio
- Reduced Highlights and Blues to restore more sky detail
- Increased Orange and Shadow to bring more facial detail and increased Luminance to manage grain

Step 3 – Finalising in Photoshop



Final



RAW

1. Cloned out flag pole and wires top right
2. Cloned out distracting bright spots in tree
3. Darkened interviewer jacket
4. Darkened corners to keep focus on centre
5. Increased overall Brightness and Contrast

Processing Case Study 6

Satire

These two dog owners were both keen seascape photographers. For me the best image that day had to involve the dog as it looked longingly at the banana.

Humour Processing: Step 1 – Selecting from a Drive



Critique:

Mirror of binoculars and camera.

Dog looking at banana.

Absurdity of using binoculars and eating banana.

Very messy sky area intersection with heads



Critique:

Owner's eyes are to camera.

Dog looking away.

Lost mirroring of binoculars and camera.

Very messy sky area intersection with heads

Step 2 – Simplify composition in LR

Library | Develop | Map | Book | Slideshow | Print | Web | ☁

DSCF6897.RAF • Copy 1
05/06/2023 10:04:34
5461 x 4860



Histogram

ISO 800 16 mm f / 8.0 1/1500 sec

Original Photo

Tool: Crop & Straighten

Aspect: Custom

Angle: Auto 0.00

Constrain to Image

Reset Close

Basic

Treatment: Color Black & White

Profile: Adobe Monochrome

WB: As Shot

Temp: 4850

Tint: +10

Tone: Auto

Exposure: +0.14

Contrast: 0

Highlights: -41

Shadows: +86

Whites: 0

Blacks: 0

- Cropped off left hand woman, some sky
- Increased Shadow to restore faces
- Reduced Highlights in Sky

Step 3 – Simplify further by cloning out in PS



Final



RAW

- Cloned out most of Backdrop conflicting with 2 heads
- Moved dog a little closer into shot and blended
- Lifted light on faces
- Darkened sky
- Boosted Midtones with Plug-in
- Vignetted bottom corners

Merged Panorama Images:

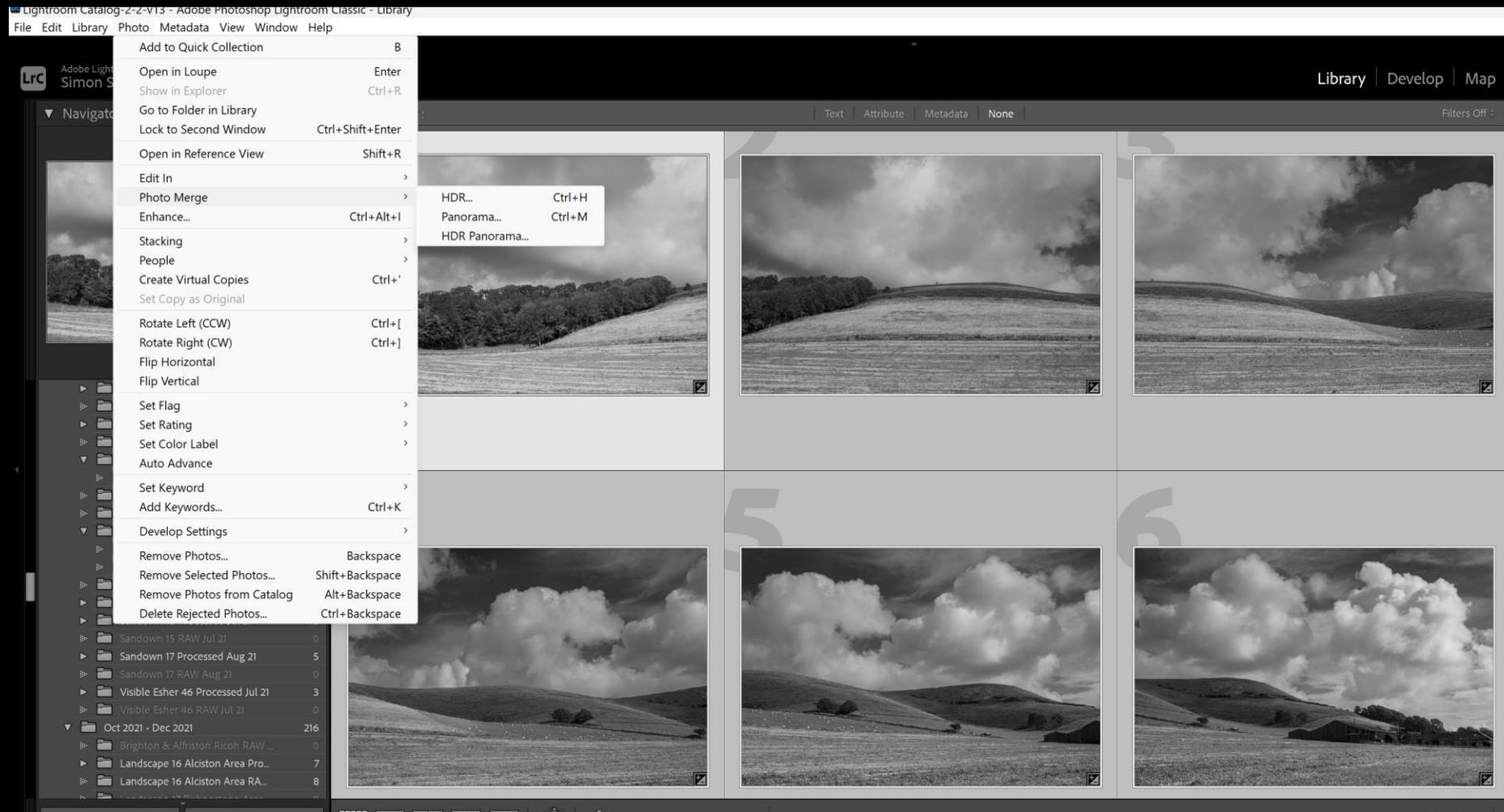
Estuary, Downs and People

Set-up

Tech Spec

- **Camera:** Fuji XH2, 1/160s +, F11, ISO400, hand-held
- **Lens:** Fuji 16-55mm F2.8
- **Processing:** Lightroom Merge for Panoramas then Photoshop

Step 1 – Using Photo Merge Panorama in LR



Start point:

- 6 hand-held images taking horizontal slices of the view from left to right
- Images overlap by 20-30%

LR Processing Set-up:

- Select all 6 images
- Photo – Photo Merge - Panorama

Step 2 – LR Panorama Merge Output processing

Initial Merge will give lots of white space around the landscape



Try clicking on 'Fill Edges' to fill in the White gaps.

If not realistic then you can crop Tighter to get rid of them

Step 3 – In LR, crop the best pano image shape



The left side has little interest so the crop at 3:1 ratio holds the eye on to the farmhouse and dramatic side-lit sky

Step 4 – Finishing in PS

- Sky and Land each have their own Layers
- Land – used EfexPro Fine Art to increase texture of the land. Stretched vertically using PS Distort. Brightened relative to the sky
- Sky – Darkened and Contrast increased to more drama



These panos are 10 merged images covering a 150 degree view



Panos can work for people images as well



Composite Images:

Beach Hutters, Woman In Black

People in Composites: Multi-People images



Commentary:

Works where the chance of getting all of the people 'right' is very low

These images were carefully matched for sun direction, camera angle, perspective and brightness

May need 10-20 PS Layers to allow exact control of different components

People in Composites: Multi-People images



Commentary:

Each component maintains a very low viewing point in bright side-lighting
Can be fun to include yourself in the image somewhere and see if people spot it
Careful blending of all edges critical to avoid that 'cut-out' look
Test the images with harsh critiques whose initial reaction will be invaluable

People in Composites: Woman in Black



Commentary:

A fun way to build up a creative story but need a consistent subject willing to 'play dead'

Typically 3-4 elements per composite each using a different skill – long exposure, blur, side flash

Macro Images: Cacti and Broken Glass

Macro Set-up

Tech Spec

- **Camera:** Fuji XH2, 1s +, F11, ISO160
- **Tripod:** Weighted Manfrotto 055
- **Lens:** Fuji 80mm Macro F2.8
- **Processing:** Lightroom, Photoshop, Helicon (for Stacking 100+ images)



My Photo Stacking kit

- ✓ Fuji XT4 + 80mm Macro + x2 Ext Tube
- ✓ Lightroom – Initial prep & 4:3 Format cropping
- ✓ Helicon – Stacking of 50 to 300 images
- ✓ Photoshop – Finishing in layers
- ✓ No Plug-in apps
- ✓ 2 and 4 TB File Back-up devices

The original shard of glass being Photo Stacked



Exported RAW Files out of LR to Helicon

The screenshot shows the Adobe Lightroom Classic Library grid with 201 photos. The 'Plug-in Extras' menu is open, and 'Export to Helicon Focus...' is selected. The grid shows a sequence of 20 photos, with photo 35 selected. The right-hand panel shows the Histogram and metadata for the selected photo: ISO 400, 80 mm, f/7.1, 0.7 sec. The bottom status bar shows '201 photos / 1 selected / DSCF3528.RAF'.

Lightroom Catalog-2-2 - Adobe Photoshop Lightroom Classic - Library

File Edit Library Photo Metadata View Window Help

- New Catalog... Ctrl+O
- Open Catalog... Ctrl+O
- Open Recent >
- Optimize Catalog...
- Import Photos and Video... Ctrl+Shift+I
- Import from Another Catalog...
- Import a Photoshop Elements Catalog...
- Tethered Capture >
- Auto Import >
- Import Develop Profiles and Presets...
- Export... Ctrl+Shift+E
- Export with Previous Ctrl+Alt+Shift+E
- Export with Preset >
- Export as Catalog...
- Email Photo...
- Plug-in Manager... Ctrl+Alt+Shift+,
- Plug-in Extras >**
 - DxO PhotoLab 2
 - Transfer to DxO PhotoLab 2**
 - Helicon Focus Export
 - Export to Helicon Focus...**
- Show Quick Collection Ctrl+B
- Save Quick Collection... Ctrl+Alt+B
- Clear Quick Collection Ctrl+Shift+B
- Set Quick Collection as Target Ctrl+Shift+Alt+B
- Library Filters >
- Printer... Ctrl+P
- Page Setup... Ctrl+Shift+P
- Exit Ctrl+Q

Library | Develop | Map | Book | Slideshow | Print | Web |

Text Attribute Metadata None Filters Off

ISO 400 80 mm f/7.1 0.7 sec

Original Photo

Custom Quick Develop

Keywording

Keyword List

Default Metadata

Comments

Import... Export...

Sort: Capture Time

Thumbnails

Sync Metadata Sync Settings

Filter: Filters Off

201 photos / 1 selected / DSCF3528.RAF

Stacked images in Helicon (on right)

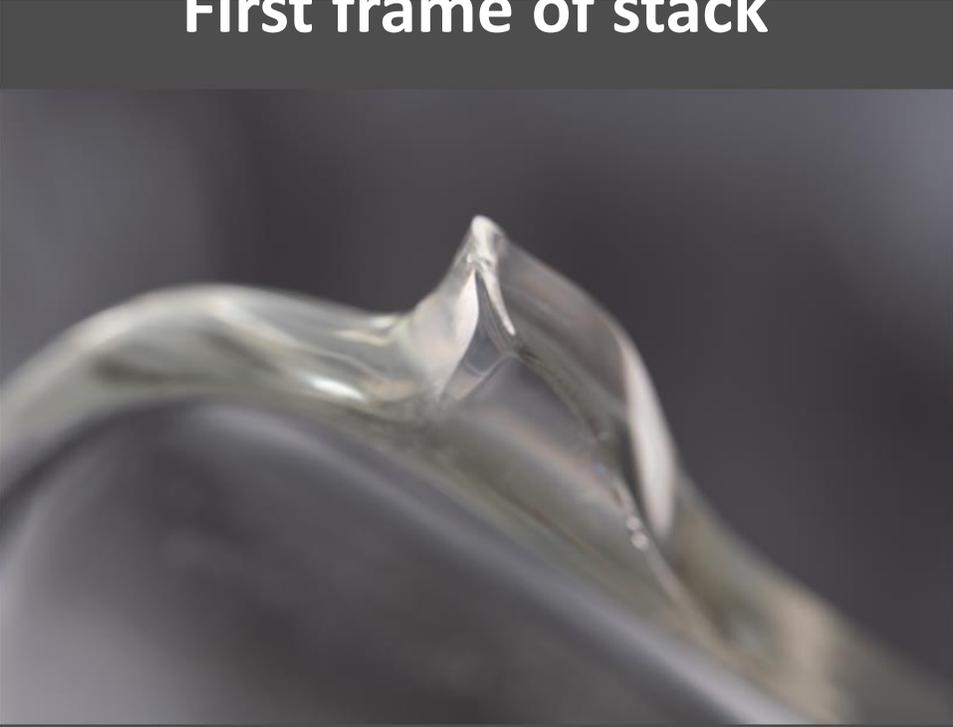
Helicon Focus 7.6.4 - Registered Pro (159 days left)

File Edit View Help

Render

Rendering Retouching Text/Scale Saving

First frame of stack



Full stack



Source images (45):

- DSCF3494.tif 15/10/2020 08:17
- DSCF3495.tif 15/10/2020 08:17
- DSCF3496.tif 15/10/2020 08:17
- DSCF3497.tif 15/10/2020 08:17
- DSCF3498.tif 15/10/2020 08:17
- DSCF3499.tif 15/10/2020 08:17
- DSCF3500.tif 15/10/2020 08:17
- DSCF3501.tif 15/10/2020 08:17

Rendering method:

- Method A (weighted average)
- Method B (depth map)
- Method C (pyramid)

Radius: 8

Smoothing: 2

Reset Render

1* 882

Stack of 70 frames



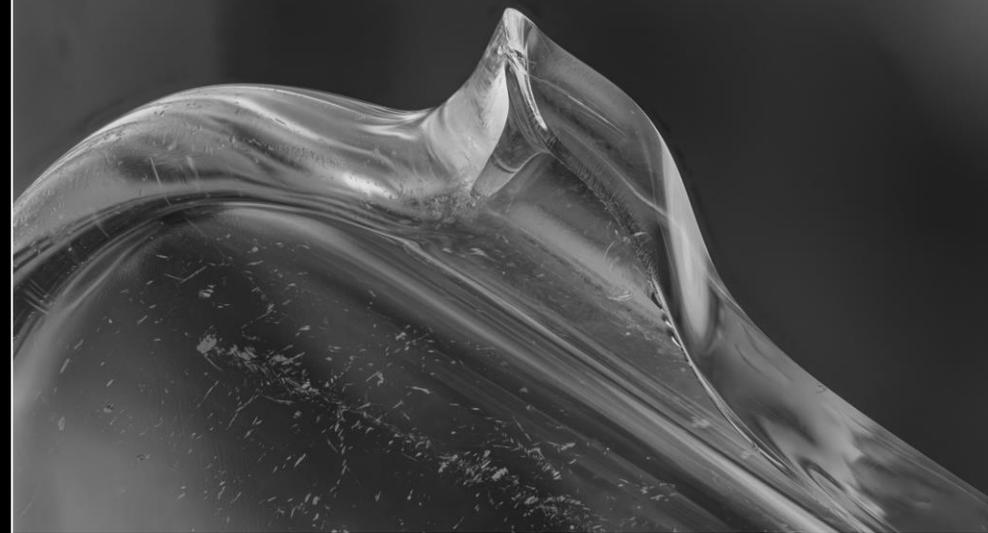
Stack of 100 frames



Stack of 140 frames



Stack of 200 frames



Final image after
A 'few' final
'tweaks' in
Photoshop
including softening
of backdrop



Typical settings

- 15-20cm from camera
- 210mm eq
- 0.25-4.0s
- F11
- ISO 400

Using around
150 stacked
images then PS
Layer Masks
and Feathering
to create a
gentle
transition to
deep black
edges

